

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

RECKLESS RALPH'S

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP



A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

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INTRODUCTION

A goodly number of years ago, when I was connected with a leading Sunday school, in one of our prominent cities, I noticed that a certain book in the library was in constant demand among the pupils, especially the large girls. It was in such favor that several copies would no more than have supplied the call for it. After a time I got hold of one copy and read it. No volume in the Sunday school library was bound so handsomely, and it contained several artistic illustrations. The book was a French novel, and the first chapter was devoted to an account of an intrigue between a married woman and her lover. The entire work was French through and through. The sanctity of the marriage relation was jeered, and the story of one elicit amour after another was set forth in the most suggestive language. There could be no more corrupting work put in the hands of either sex. The poisonous seeds which it had already sown among the youths of the Sunday school must have produced a frightful harvest.

The superintendent of the school was an intelligent business man, held in the highest respect throughout the city. He was so occupied with his own duties throughout the week that he found no time to read anything of a secular nature. I placed the volume referred to in his hands and asked him to examine it and to give his views regarding it. He did so. When I saw him a week later he was pale with indignation.

"I am horrified," he said. "That vile

work was read by my daughter only a short time ago. I never dreamed that such a serpent could creep into our library."

"How was it," I asked, "that it gained an entrance?"

"We appointed a committee last year to select new books for the library. Not one of the brethren was fit for the task. They noticed that these 'Memoirs' were beautifully bound and had attractive pictures; that was enough for them, and do doubt that was the only test they used in making their selections. This particular pest will do no more harm."

"Why not?"

"I have burned it, and shall make sure it is never replaced. I shall give the next few weeks to a critical examination of the library, with special attention to the most popular books."

"Since you are going to take up the work of censor will you oblige me by reading this little volume and tell me if it is worthy of a place in the library?"

The superintendent smilingly took the work, which was neatly bound and printed, and assured me that he would do as I requested him to do. When he finished his perusal, some days later, he said, with a glowing face:

"If you will get me several copies of the book, I will put them in the library. I have never been more interested in a story; it is strong, stirring, and appeals to that love of incident and adventure which is natural to every healthy youth."

"But what of its moral tone?"

"It is clean. It does not contain a single evil thought; its tendency is in the right direction, and it leaves a pleasant taste in the mouth. I consider it the right kind of literature to put in the hands of the young."

"And yet that little book is a dime novel. I merely took off the paper cover and had it tastefully bound. You have given it the only true and fair test, and your verdict is what I expected to hear."

The superintendent was astonished, and could hardly credit what I told him.

"Perhaps," he remarked quizzically, "the fact that I noticed that it was written by you prejudiced me in its favor."

"More likely the prejudice worked the other way, but what you have said is another of the many proofs of the unthinking judgement of the multitude, based wholly on appearances. The good brethren who gave that vicious French novel a prominent place in the Sunday school library would have revolted at the proposal to put this little story beside it for the reason that it has a paper cover, and is salmon color and is honest enough to proclaim the truth—this is, that it is a novel."

The above incident illustrates the prejudice that grew up and kept pace with the popularity of the original dime novel. At the same time, it can not be denied that the disfavor of those publications became justified after a time, as I shall presently show.

The first dime novel was published in 1859, was written by Mrs. Ann S. Stephens, who had gained long before an honorable name among writers of light literature, and whose highly popular story "Fashion and Famine," had not only gone into numerous editions, but had been dramatized. The original firm who evolved the scheme of issuing the works of well known writers and selling them for a dime a copy was composed of Irwin P. Beadle, Erastus F., his elder brother, and Robert T. Adams. The last named was afflicted with pulmonary trouble and died a few years later. He was succeeded by his brother William, who outlived the others, and indeed outlived the dime novel, which passed out of existence several years before his

own death. Each member of the firm made a handsome fortune, though all did not keep it.

Among the writers of the first dime novels was Mrs. Vetta V. Victor one of the most talented and popular writers of the West; Colonel A. J. Duganne, a poet of no mean ability, and an Episcopal clergyman. The congregation of the last-named gentleman discovered his secret—he used a *nom de plume*—and made things interesting for him, but he was great enough to care naught for their opinion. Bret Harte engaged to write a number of stories for Beadle, but slipped up at the last moment, because of a more tempting offer from a leading firm of publishers.

The editor of the dime novel was Orville J. Victor, a cultured and brilliant critic, as well as author, who has written several standard historical works, and had been for a number of years previous the literary adviser of the publishing firm of Derby and Jackson. At this writing, he is living, honored and respected by all who know him. I have never met a cleaner, more honest and upright gentleman. He was the husband of Mrs. M. V. Victor, and there never was a more beautiful home than that of these two with their numerous children, all of whom, with their father, worship the memory of the loving mother who left them many years ago.

The dime novels were popular from the first—so popular, indeed, that the publishers determined to make them more so. They chose as the story which was to advertise the series the eighth number issued. This was entitled "SETH JONES" written by a verdant fellow in his teens, whose name is subscribed to this Introduction. Their first step was to placard the country with "dodgers" and posters, composed of the simple question, "Who is Seth Jones?" A few weeks later these placards gave place to a big picture of a hunter, in coonskin cap and border costume, with a rifle resting easily on one arm, and the announcement "I am Seth Jones," adding the interesting information that the book with that title could be purchased at all newsdealers for ten cents.

The unique means by which this

little book was advertised gave it a circulation far beyond its merits. It was republished abroad and translated into several languages. I have seen a copy in French and one in Welsh. In the latter issue a note at the head gives the information that the author is a Welshman—something he has never before suspected, since, according to the record, he was born in OHIO. Some years after the publication of "Seth Jones," I asked the elder Beadle how many copies had been sold. "I cannot give the exact figure," he replied, "but as nearly as we can make out, it is about 400,000, which doesn't take into account the copies sold and printed on the other side."

The impetus thus given to one issue affected others, and the dime novels gained an immense popularity. Hundreds of thousands were sent to the armies in the field, and among those who liked them were prominent generals and officers, legislators, judges, students, clergymen and more than one scholar and scientist. That many of them were crude, faulty, and of little literary merit is undeniable, but as I have stated, they are clean, wholesome and, to quote the North American Review, did not pander to vice in the remotest form. In the issue of the periodical named for July, 1864, that eminent authority was kind enough to say of my stories; "They are popular, and deserve to be. Mr. Ellis's Indians are real beings and not fancy sketches." Candor compels me to add that the Review spoke lightly of all the dime novels published up to that time with the exception of those written by me.

Beadle paid liberal prices, and I wrote him a number of stories, all relating to Western and Border life. I was younger then than now, and do not take any pride in those early, ill-constructed works, but I maintain that no criticism could be made on their moral tone.

One day when chatting with Mr. Beadle he nodded toward the door leading to an outer room, in which an employee was tying up bundles of novels for shipment. "There," said he, "is an illustration of the advantage of the English system over ours. That man has worked for us nearly two years. I pay him sixteen dollars a week; he is perfectly content with

those wages; he will never wish to change his situation or try to improve it. If he were an American, he would speedily demand higher pay. As it is, he will be satisfied to grow old and serve us for the rest of his life."

The individual whom he thus referred to was George P. Munro, a native of Nova Scotia, who was certainly an industrious workman and gave satisfaction to his employer. I should say that previous to this Irwin P. Beadle had been frozen out of the old firm. He was a kind hearted man, but addicted to drink. He was paid a fair price to withdraw, and resumed work-at his trade as a binder. Munro sought him out and proposed that they unite and publish dime novels for themselves. Beadle snapped at the chance, and in a few weeks their first issue was put upon the market. Since the series was called "New Dime Novels" and bore the imprint of Irwin P. Beadle, the blow was a serious one to the original firm. The latter secured an injunction against the use of the title, and Munro changed the name to the "Ten Cent Novels." His sales were immense.

The novels issued by Munro were absolute trash. Many of the titles were shocking, and he hired the services of hacks who would turn him out a novel a week, such as it was, and he got them at insignificant cost. When I ventured to rally Beadle on his mistake regarding Munro, he said his own firm had had a consultation over the situation and decided to meet Munro on his own ground. I protested, and urged him to seek to elevate rather than to degrade his publications, assuring him that though he might be injuriously affected for the time, the final result would be in his favor. I said that the satisfaction of issuing works in which he and his family could feel an honest pride was of more value than money. He could see only the commercial side of the business, and made the disastrous change. The dime novel descended to the plane of the ten-cent novel, and the name became synonymous with the veriest rot. Instead of making the hero adults, as had been the case, boys were introduced and made to do the most farcical impossibilities; the pages became crimson, and no parent having the good of his children at

heart would allow a dime novel to cross his threshold.

Poor Irwin Beadle was soon crowded out by Munro, and died some years later. Munro added the "Seaside Library" to his publications. These were imprints of standard authors, and proved very profitable. He started a story paper, which was also successful, and when he died, broke in health, he was a millionaire.

The authors identified with the original dime novels withdrew from all connections with them. None of the writers I have named appeared in later issues. E. F. Beadle made a vigorous canvass for Congress at his home in Cooperstown, N. Y. but was defeated, and died a few years later, a wealthy man. Left alone, William Adams carried forward the business in a limping fashion, but it finally expired of inanition, and he was not long in following it. The dime novel vanished from earth years ago as utterly as the buffalo has disappeared.

A surprising but pleasing fact has been the repeated and increasing requests that have come to me from critics, literary men and readers on both sides of the Atlantic during the past few years for the reissue of some of the old dime novels. It is impossible to buy them anywhere, the present generation knows nothing of them, but there seems to be a goodly belonging to the past generation who recall them pleasantly. I have often wondered what these friends saw in the novels that they should wish to read them again. I never entertain the idea of trying to reawaken the interest that died long ago, but was content to let them be forgotten, believing there was little or nothing in them worthy to live. A well known Western editor said in a letter to me: "Beadle published many better stories for ten cents than are being sold today for \$1.50." A writer in New York Sun said: "A while ago I picked up a bundle of old dime novels, some of them a quarter of a century old, and I read a dozen of them with the greatest imaginable enjoyment. They are splendid reading—far and away ahead of a vast amount of the so-called legitimate fiction of this period. They are literally stuffed and crammed with action. The people in them were doing something or other,

and something interesting too, on every page. They moved hither and yon, performing prodigies, but moving—that is the important thing, that people in a book shall demonstrate their right to exist by getting a move on them." Some of these dime novels of Western Life that I read with keen relish the other day had as much action, and legitimate, quite obviously necessary action too, in four pages as the average present day Western novel contains throughout. I would seriously recommend some of these Western writers, people who have the color and atmosphere of the West but who apparently do not know how to get any movement into their stories, to obtain a bunch of these old-time Western dime novels and get a few points from them. About half a dozen of the Western dime novels that I read the other day were all worthy of being done over again by some accomplished hand, enlarged and written in, with hardly any variation at all of the theme and incidents, so excellent are they in that respect.

Looking through my stories, written nearly half a century ago, my inclination was against any attempt to bring them to life again, but in the event of doing so to rewrite them throughout; and if that were done, they would no longer be original. The advice of my literary friend is good: only the absolutely necessary changes should be made. Thus the opening of "Seth Jones" gives the date as three-fourths of a century ago. It would be absurd to allow this to stand. There are anachronisms, crudities, and slips here and there which must not be overlooked. I have changed these, smoothed down the rough edges and polished the diction where necessary, but the stories themselves are substantially as they were first written and published, and you are respectfully invited to form your own judgment.

Edward S. Ellis, January 1907

Attached is a recap of the Introduction in the book titled "SETH JONES of NEW HAMPSHIRE" written by Edward S. Ellis and published in cloth bound book form by G. W. Dillingham Company, Publishers, New York.

Copyright 1907

Issued February 1907

The above story is a reprint of the original first published in "Beadle's

half dime library Vol. 1 No. 8 published in 1877 by Beadle and Adams, under the title "SETH JONES; or The Captives of the Frontier." The picture of Seth Jones on this novel being used as the picture for the Frontispiece in the cloth bound book, from which the attached INTRODUCTION was copied.

The same story was also reprinted in the "Street & Smith" famous "Medial Library" #355 and under the title "Tracked through the Wilds."

Respectfully yours
Lou Kohrt

NEWSY NEWS

by Ralph F. Cummings

Last call for the Gilbert Patten memorial. Anyone wishing to send in a donation towards the plaque do it now.

M. Brauner, new member No. 221, has 70 copies of The Golden Argosy for sale, what's offered?

Delbert Love lost his mother in October and Gil Patten's cousin died in November, both in 1946.

Aubrey W. Edgerton of Houston, Texas, is very ill. Drop him a nice cheery letter, fellows.

H. B. Patten, son of the late Gil Patten of Merriwell fame, is with us. He is member No. 216.

Taken from the N. Y. Cavalcade by Louis Sobal, Nov. 14th, 1946. "On Fifth Ave., I encountered H. B. Patten, son of the late Gil Patten, creator of the beloved Frank and Dick Merriwell of our youth...I tell Patten many of us have been getting a thrill out of the Frank Merriwell broadcasts Saturday mornings, in which the famed baseball hero has been brought back to life. (Remember the befuddling "double curve"?)

My printer tells me he may have to charge me more every month to print the Roundup, as he can't get the experienced help, and paper is scarce too, so you see fellows what we are up against. He'll hold off as long as he can, before he goes up, and in the meantime I'm to see what I can do, whether to raise your dues, or raise the ad rates, or both, or bring Roundup out every two months. Which shall it be, fellows? Let me know, so I can plan accordingly. I hate to do it, but I see I've got to. Many's the time I've

dug deep into my pockets, and even had to sell lots of my best novels, to keep the Roundup going. Look fellows, all through the depression, there wasn't enough came in to have the Roundup printed, and if I was to reckon everything I've put into the Roundup during that time, I'd still be in the red. Maybe you think I'm foolish to keep the Roundup a going, maybe I am, but I figure the Roundup is part of me, and it helps to give me a living in selling my novels and story papers, of which I have no other way of making. I've been under a doctors care for over 5 years now, and still am, but I want to do everything I can to make the members all as happy as possible. I want to return the favor to the members and other readers, "two fold," for doing all they could for me, and I'll do my best in keeping good old Roundup a going too. We are now entering our 15th Volume, as the magazine first appeared in January 1931.

John T. McIntyre says that Mrs. E. Burke Collins wrote for the Norman L. Munro story papers. She came from Rochester, N. Y. Her name was Emma Augusta Browne. At seventeen she married Collins. He was killed by a gunshot while hunting, after that, for some time, she had a hard time getting along. She tried writing, and sold her first story to the Family Story Paper. Afterwards, she wrote for other papers. At one time she had five serials running at the same time in five different papers. She lived most of the time at New Orleans, La. She was married three times. She wrote 125 serials in 25 years. She died at Henderson, N. C., in 1902.

We thank our printer for his untiring efforts to bring out the Roundup on time every month, and his fine piece of work too.

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Ralph F. Cummings, Fisherville, Mass.

Roland D. Sawyer, Ware, Mass.—wants a story published around 1906 in J. S. Ogilvie's 50c paper covered series entitled "Rrentza Sonata Bearing Fruit," by Pauline Grayson.

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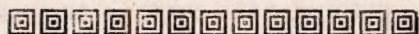
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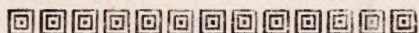
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